

# Mr. Ford's Page

OF ALL the secret societies which can be found on the earth, there is probably none so secret as a public government. And the secrecy tends to increase. There has lately been introduced in England a bill which practically makes it a crime even to know anything which some government subordinate may decide that you ought not to know. Secret enough before, the war has wrapped all governments round with thicker robes of secrecy, until the light that pours through is hardly light at all, but simply gray shadows upon the darkness.

The full point of this statement is seen when it is remembered that the "government," as the term is commonly used, means only a group of men, all of whom could be placed in one small building. Nothing is secret to them. They are aware of, or have access to, all the information which is gathered through the various agencies of the government. And some of them share it, doubtless, with certain privileged persons who are not officially connected with the government. But as for the people, who supplied the information, in whose behalf it was supposed to be gathered, who actually paid the cost of gathering and classifying it, they are not to be trusted with it. It is a very curious fact that governments will trust each other much more willingly than they will trust their own people. This was brought out rather vividly in the recent decision made by the council of the League of Nations, namely, that the discussions between nations may be secret.

Secret from whom? In the very nature of the case, the discussion, occurring in the League, will be known to representatives of every nation associated with the League. There is, therefore, no secrecy to be had against each other. And that, of course, has always been the most useful pretense for secrecy—"If we let the people know it, it would leak out to some other government."

Secret from whom? Why, from the people, of course. The people are very seldom let into any secret. And much that they ought to know, and have a right to know, in order that their loyalty may be intelligent, is kept from them on the ground that it would be giving away secrets to other nations.

As a matter of fact, there are no secrets between the nations. No nation succeeds in keeping a thought or a movement concealed from another nation. What doesn't leak out through "diplomacy" leaks out in "espionage." No nation is ever deceived by another. But, and this is the important fact, every nation is highly successful in keeping its own people in the dark.

Now, that is sufficiently strange: only the people are kept in the dark.

But what is especially interesting just now, and perhaps significant, is that there is a strong tendency to perpetuate the rule of secret-making which gained such impetus during the war. Every war has this aftermath: under cover of hostilities, and under the blanket of fear which is spread abroad upon the people, certain powers are usurped, certain practices are established, certain authority is exercised, of which the beneficiaries of these emergency practices hate to let go when the war is ended.

We see this today. There is no doubt whatever that, due to the extraordinary war powers granted in certain quarters, a certain group in the United States were enabled to fasten more tightly their grip on certain essential lines of business and to put more securely under their control certain great sources of income. They were aiming at it before the war; they sufficiently connected themselves with government activity during the war to put them at the inside of all the important secrets and near the control of all the secret and special agencies; when the war ended, these groups were owners of all they sought, and had strangle-holds on other things which the war did not last long enough to enable them to acquire.

However secret many activities of the government were from the mass of the people, they were not secret from designing men. Indeed, the secrecy was necessary to enable these men to play

their game, and it might not be very difficult to show that they were really the originators of many of the rules of secrecy.

We, therefore, find ourselves emerging from a long period of secrecy only to discover that under cover of it certain advantages were taken which never would have been permitted in the light.

And, again, the only ones who are in the dark about it are the people.

It is one of the most puzzling developments of these times, that those in power, even in a free country like the United States where the people are constitutionally loyal to the government and willing to protect it in the exercise of all its powers, are really afraid to trust the people.

That is rather a harsh way to put it, but it is the truth. The government, our own government, which is in possession of mountains of information, enough information to set the people right on every problem that now distresses them, deliberately withholds it. As a result of this absence of facts—perfectly good and accessible facts—there is widespread public confusion, and under cover of it somebody is getting away with the game. If the facts were given, there would doubtless be some stir—probably a very angry stir, maybe such an upheaval of public opinion as has not been witnessed in this country in half a century. Quite likely there would be. But even that might be preferred, and certainly would be more wholesome than the fictitious idea of affairs which the people have now.

The absence of facts—a deliberately created shortage of facts—has reduced the people to a state of helplessness which is just as ruinous as it would be if they were reduced to a shortage of food. Indeed, a people on a short ration of fact is in a far worse condition than a people on a short ration of food. Facts, whole facts, unadulterated facts, are the food on which a nation builds a strong life.

A certain coterie always has access to the government's store of facts. There are certain "leaks" which serve private purposes. There are always influences which are ready to intimate that such-and-such things ought to be kept secret "in the interest of public policy." It was a secret, which even few members of Congress knew, that 93 per cent of the total income of the United States Government goes for past and present military bills, the most of it in interest.

It would almost seem desirable that a new cabinet position be created—Secretary of Information. What about the coal? What about the sugar? What about the disposition of property seized in the war? What about the changes in business control which have come as a result of the war? Who are the principal unofficial hangers-on, what is their hold, and what is their profit? The government is a series of public offices with public functions, and yet what it has worthy

of knowing is less public than the affairs of any private corporation—less public, that is, to the people.

The necessity for secrecy has always been urged on the ground that it is undesirable for other governments to know what is going on. Yet other governments do know what is going on. It is provided in the League of Nations that all the member-nations, through their representatives, shall "sit in" on all the propositions discussed. But as for letting the people know about the discussions, the governments agree with one voice—No!

Either the people are not competent to understand, or the knowledge is unfit for the people to have. Either the people are not to be trusted, or they are too unbalanced to know what their political servants do. In any case, it is very difficult to make it appear other than strange. It cannot be satisfactorily explained.

It is readily granted that much that goes on between governments would be very dangerous to public tranquillity if it were known. But the answer to that is, there should be no such interchanges between governments. Most of the secrecy which is considered necessary is due to the questionable character of that which is transpiring.

**GOVERNMENTS do not fear each other so much as they fear their people. They are willing to meet in council, where representatives of all the governments are present, and discuss their most important affairs; but they are not willing that their people should know what those discussions are. Government secrets are secrets from the people, not from other governments. No government ever succeeds in keeping a secret from another. It is always the people who are in the dark. A government is a great fact collector; it has enough information on hand all the time to flood with light all the questions around which the people now grope in darkness. But those facts are not made public. It would cause some stir if they were. That is what governments fear. And—depend upon it!—there are certain unofficial groups who fatten off this secrecy, because what is secret from the people is open to them, and they have the people at a disadvantage.**